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2 U.S. WARSHIPS STEAMING - BEIRUT EVAC SEEN

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TWO powerful U.S. warships today were speeding toward strife-torn Beirut as a new wave of violence threatens the lives of American diplomats and citizens.

The hasty departure of the ships from Spain fueled speculation they are being rushed to Beirut for a possible evacuation of Americans from Lebanon, scene of a shocking new wave of terrorism.

The aircraft carrier Eisenhower and the missile-cruiser USS Mississippi abruptly left Mallorca Island off Spain Thursday night, three days before their official liberty ends.

The ships sped off so hastily that 110 crew members were stranded on shore.

The two warships and a flotilla of support vessels already were en route when Beirut was rocked yesterday by its worst car bomb in six months, killing at least 45 people.

State Dept. spokesman Edward Djerejian said:

"Obviously we continue to be concerned about the security of U.S. government personnel in Lebanon and have their safety and their status continually under review."

He said no decision had been made, as of yesterday, to evacuate U.S. embassy personnel.

But another U.S. offi-

cial, who did not want to be named, made clear that Djerejian was not ruling out a future decision to evacuate U.S. embassy personnel and other Americans from Lebanon.

ABC News reported it had learned that unidentified men and explosives reportedly were moving through portions of Lebanon, possibly for a terrorist attack against Americans or a U.S. institution in the Middle East.

The network quoted Pentagon and intelligence agency sources as saying that Washington was prepared to respond with military force against Iran if it could link Tehran to any attack against U.S. interests.

In mid-January, Tehran was warned through Swiss contacts that the U.S. would retaliate, perhaps with a quick air strike against a base in Iran that is believed to be a training camp for international terrorists, ABC said.

In addition, CBS News reported that two U.S. C-130 Hercules transports, which could be used for an evacuation, arrived on the island of Cyprus yesterday.

In recent days, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of threats to Americans from terrorist groups.

The threats appear to coincide with a blistering United Nations debate over a Lebanese-

sponsored resolution sharply condemning Israeli actions in southern Lebanon.

UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick said this week that there have been three threats — including one a few days ago — to retaliate against Americans if the U.S. vetoes the resolution.

In Beirut, U.S. embassy spokesman Robert Gould said Washington has plans to evacuate the embassy if there is any serious deterioration in security.

Less than a dozen Americans are believed to be assigned to the embassy now.

But in all, there are an estimated 1400 Americans living in Lebanon. Most are full-time residents and have dual citizenship.

Kirkpatrick, in discussing the recent threats, said the U.S. and Britain both were named as countries that would "face strong problems" if they veto the resolution, which could come up next week.

Reports from Beirut say the American ambassador there, Reginald Bartholomew, has informed the Lebanese government that the U.S. will veto the measure if Lebanon presses the document to a vote.

Last Sept. 20, after the U.S. vetoed another Lebanese resolution condemning Israel, a suicide driver detonated a booby-trapped truck outside the embassy annex in east Beirut.

Islamic Jihad, or Holy War, claimed responsibility for that bombing.

Meanwhile, UN officials said they have ordered Americans serving on the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon off the job for fear of possible attacks by Shiite Moslem.